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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000044

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/21/2019

TAGS: PGOV PINS PHUM ML

SUBJECT: YOUTH GROUP LEADER ARRESTED AFTER CALLING FOR FORCE AGAINST TUAREG REBELS

REF: 08 BAMAKO 00822

Classified By: Pol/Con Officer Scott Reese, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary. On January 14, plain clothes police officers arrested Circle for Youth Reflection and Action (CRAJ) leader Mahamane Mariko and held him for approximately 28 hours. Over the past few weeks CRAJ has posted throughout Bamako yellow leaflets with slogans in black block letters proclaiming, to quote a few, "Down with Qadhafi, Godfather of Bandits and Mercenaries," "No to the Reintegration of Armed Bandits into the Army," and "Liberate the Hostages." On January 12 Mariko held a press conference during which he called on the Malian government to use force against Tuareg rebels in northern Mali and announced more CRAJ sponsored activities in days to come. Although several opposition parties urged President Amadou Toumani Toure to respond with force in May 2006 when Tuareg rebels first attacked Malian military outposts in Kidal and Menaka, mainstream opposition leaders subsequently softened their tone in part to cultivate support from northern Mali. Mariko and CRAJ are the first group to publicly demand a military response to Tuareg unrest. It does not appear that Mariko or CRAJ have much of a following among youth in Bamako. However, Mariko's sudden appearance -- at a time when the Algiers Accords appear to be breaking down and Tuareg rebel attacks are on the rise -- and the combative nature of his message seems to have sparked a quick and heavy-handed response by Malian authorities. End Summary.

CRAJ: Give War a Chance

2.(U) Plain clothes police officers arrested CRAJ leader Mahamane Mariko at his home on January 14. Police released Mariko 28 hours later, on January 15, without pressing charges. Two days prior to his arrest, Mariko held a lively press conference in Bamako which called for President Toure to break with the Algiers Accords, Algeria, and Libya and use force to combat Tuareg rebels. "The members of the Circle for Youth Reflection and Action," Mariko told the local media, "will always say no to the accords of capitulation of Algiers and to Libyan hegemony over Mali. We will do everything within our means to preserve the unity and integrity of our country." Although Mariko had no kind words for Algeria, his criticism focused primarily on Qadhafi and Malian government authorities whom he accused of being addicted to Libyan petro-dollars. He also faulted the Malian government for failing to inform Malian citizens of problems in the north or explain the government's policy toward Tuareg unrest.

3.(U) Perhaps sensing the eventual response of Malian officials, Mariko said "neither interrogations nor aggression against our members will distract us, for we believe that Mali belongs to all of us. We are not ready to abandon our

country because it is burning today." Mariko then called on listeners to join CRAJ and mobilize for a united and unified Mali by rejecting the Algiers Accords. He also demanded the prosecution of those guilty of "betraying" the Malian military and the resignation of unnamed public officials.

4.(U) The CRAJ press conference followed a several week long leaflet campaign which affixed terse slogans like "Down with Qadhafi," "No to Armed Bandits," and "Liberate the Hostages" to light poles, buildings, and monuments across Bamako.

Asked to comment on the reasoning behind this public relations strategy, Mariko said the leaflets were "a means for us to inform the public." He added that CRAJ had posted the leaflets in "broad daylight under the eyes of security forces." Mariko also said CRAJ had written President Toure to request a meeting, "not to sing his praises but to tell him the truth, and our approach to the crisis and its management." Mariko closed the press conference by urging his listeners to open their eyes to reality and said CRAJ had more events planned for the days to come. He was arrested two days later.

Background on the CRAJ

5.(U) Prior to its leaflet campaign, CRAJ was a largely unknown group apparently created to advocate for greater educational and employment opportunities for Malian youth. In 2005 Mariko made statements in support of the opposition party Rally for Mali (RPM) led by former National Assembly President and failed presidential candidate Ibrahim Boubacar

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Keita. During a two-day CRAJ rally in April 2008, Mariko pressed the government to put an end to the continuous strikes - by both faculty and students - at the University of Bamako. CRAJ's only other public appearance occurred in 2007 when Mariko called for the resignation of Mali's embattled Minister of Mines, Ahmed Sow. Sow resigned a few months later due to allegations of corruption stemming from his previous job overseeing the European Union's Center for Business Development (Ref. A).

Comment: Public Patience for Peace

6.(C) CRAJ appears to be a marginal group with relatively limited public support. Their mass leaflet campaign, however, indicated that Mariko and CRAJ have at least some financial backing. Mariko's public call for the use of force was distinctly unusual for Mali and did not go unnoticed by Mali's Tuareg community. While most Malians disagree with Mariko's provocative methods, many have been privately expressing similar sentiments for some time: that force is the only way to respond to Tuareg rebels. The leaflets CRAJ posted around Bamako elicited no response from the Malian government. Mariko's press conference, however, apparently went too far and the security forces' quick response - to arrest Mariko and detain him for more than 24 hours - may have revealed the extent to which the Malian government feels vulnerable on this issue. Despite Mariko's peripheral status, his sudden and very public appearance seemingly increased pressure on President Toure to appear responsive to rising frustration, both within the Malian public and the ranks of the military, over Mali's apparent inability to adequately respond to Tuareg rebel attacks. During a January 20 speech to commemorate Malian armed forces day, Toure told the Malian military that while Mali remained committed to the Algiers Accords and a peaceful settlement, he would use all "operational means" to ensure security in the north (septel). This speech, promising peace on one hand and a firm response on the other, may provide an indication of how Toure plans on balancing his support for peace with an increased public demand for action.

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